



State of Wisconsin
Department of Health and Family Services

Jim Doyle, Governor
Helene Nelson, Secretary

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CONTACT: Eva Robelia, Communications Officer, 608-266-1683

BACK TO SCHOOL HEALTH AND SAFETY TIPS

MADISON— It's back to school time and State Health officials remind parents to add health and safety lessons to the list of things to do before the 2006-2007 school year starts.

A healthy school year begins with making sure your child's immunizations are up-to-date. "Childhood immunization is one of the easiest and most important things we can do to make sure our children grow up healthy and free from the effects of serious, vaccine-preventable diseases," said Jeffrey Davis, M.D., in the Division of Public Health.

Parents and caregivers are encouraged to keep track of each immunization visit, and to ask their health care provider about how to access their child's immunization records through the Wisconsin Immunization Registry. State Health officials stress that immunizations are very safe thanks to medical research and ongoing review by doctors and researchers. Vaccinations are not only for children entering grades k-12, but also recommended for college students, particularly those freshmen living in dorms. These students should consider vaccination to protect against meningitis and hepatitis B.

Before school begins, it is also a good idea to consider having your child see your health care provider for a physical health check-up. "Even if your child is up-to-date on immunizations, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that your school-age child have a complete history and physical exam, including weight, blood pressure, hearing and vision screening, and prevention counseling at least every two years," said Murray Katcher, M.D., P.h.D., in the Division of Public Health. The Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletics Association (WIAA) has a requirement for a sports physical for children who want to participate in school sports.

Healthy eating, being active and getting enough sleep go hand in hand with good learning. Children who eat healthy foods, have regular meals, including breakfast, and are active at least 60 minutes each day are more likely to be successful in school. Pack meals that are easy to prepare, healthy and fun to eat.

Whether young people are walking or biking to school, it is important to get there safely. Make sure your child's walk to school is a safe route with well-trained adult crossing guards at every intersection. Because children are impulsive and tend to be less cautious around traffic, carefully consider whether your child is ready to walk to school without adult supervision. If your child will be biking to school, they should:

- always wear a bicycle helmet, no matter how short or long the ride
- ride on the right side of the road, in the same direction as traffic
- use appropriate hand signals
- pay attention to traffic lights and stop signs
- wear bright color clothing so drivers see them

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If taking a bus to school, teach and help your child learn safety measures. They should never walk behind the bus, and if they must cross the street, they should walk on the sidewalk or along the side of the road to a point at least five giant steps (10 feet) ahead of the bus before crossing. Be sure that the bus driver can see them, and they can see the bus driver.

While thinking about how your children will be carrying their school supplies and books to and from school, remember to consider the limits of backpacks, which are often heavy to use. To prevent back pain, choose a backpack with wide, padded shoulder straps and a padded back. The backpack should never weigh more than 10 to 20 percent of the child's total body weight. Have your child always use both straps as slinging a backpack over one shoulder can strain muscles and may increase curvature of the spine.

Going back to school can be an exciting and fun time. Preparing for the school year can help your student make the most of their educational experience. For information on any of the health topics mentioned here, visit these web sites:

The Wisconsin Immunization Program <http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov/immunization>

Healthy eating and being active <http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov/health/physicalactivity/index.htm>

General information about children's health and safety <http://www.aap.org/parents.html>

Walk to school safety tips <http://www.usa.safekids.org/walk-to-school/safetyTips.html>

Riding a bus to school safety tips http://nhtsa.gov/people/injury/buses/kidsschoolbus_en.html

Bicycling safety tips <http://www.dot.state.wi.us/safety/vehicle/bicycle/index.htm>

School health programs and related student services <http://dpi.wi.gov/sspw/index.html>

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